

How to Make and Keep Effective New Year's Resolutions

The holidays are upon us, and January is just around the corner. That can only mean one thing—New Year's resolutions! But before you invest in that expensive piece of exercise equipment, swear off smoking, or sign up to coach Little League, take some time to think about what you really want to accomplish in the next year. Then come up with a plan for meeting your goals. The following are some practical guidelines for making—and keeping—effective New Year's resolutions.

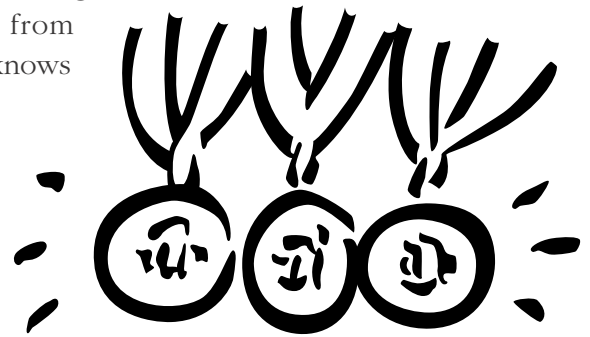
Be Realistic

Exercise every day, lose 50 pounds, save \$1,000 or more each month. Setting high standards for yourself is important, but only when they are achievable. Don't set yourself up to fail. Instead, think realistically about what you can accomplish in the coming year. If you have trouble doing this yourself, try getting feedback from someone who is honest, objective and knows you well.

Set S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Use dates, times, amounts—any form of measurement that helps you establish specific goals to accomplish. Avoid vague words like “soon,” “some,” and “a few.” For example,

instead of resolving to spend “more time” with your family, plan to participate in “at least one recreational activity each month with your family.” To be effective, a goal must be S.M.A.R.T.



Specific—The more detailed and focused your goal, the better. For example, rather than just setting a goal to “save for retirement” be more specific about exactly how much to save.

Measurable—Have criteria for measuring the progress of your goal. Make sure you can answer the question, “How will I know when it is accomplished?”

Action-oriented—Goal statements should start with an action verb, such as “Plan a family vacation” or “Quit smoking.”

Realistic—To be realistic, a goal must be something that you are willing and able to work towards. Goals should be challenging but not impossible.

Time bound—A deadline will encourage action and help you avoid a common goal-setting pitfall—procrastination.

Think Positively

Avoid negatives like “won’t” and “don’t,” and conditional words like “might” and “if.” Instead of resolving to “stop arguing with my friends,” vow to be open-minded when you have differences of opinion. Instead of, “I won’t have any dessert until I reach my goal weight,” commit to treating yourself to a dessert after you’ve finished exercising. Succeeding in your New Year’s resolutions will be much easier if you take a positive approach.

Do It for Yourself, Not Others

Make sure that your New Year’s resolutions are truly yours. One of the biggest reasons we don’t live up to our resolutions is that they are imposed on us by others. Before you vow to fit into a size 6 dress, run a marathon, or build that addition on the back of the house, stop and ask yourself these important questions:

- Am I doing this solely to please someone else, or am I doing it because I really want to?
- What are the implications of making this resolution? How will it change my life?
- Will my New Year’s resolution make me happier, healthier, or more productive?

You’ll be much more likely to live up to New Year’s resolutions if you know you’re making them for the right reasons.

Put It in Writing

Writing down your New Year’s resolutions will help you maintain a clear sense of what you’re trying to accomplish and chart your progress. Try using a calendar or “to do” list, and stick with it!

Remember . . .

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to you and your eligible dependents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All services are confidential and provided at no cost to you. As part of your EAP, you now have access to MagellanAssist. Visit today at <http://www.dpa.ca.gov/benefits/other/eap/Assist.shtm>.

New Year’s Resolutions From A to Z

It’s never too early to think about your New Year’s resolutions. Following are some practical and fun resolution suggestions to help you get 2004 started on the right foot.

Arrive five minutes early for appointments.

Budget your finances.

Conserve water—and electricity.

Do something nice for someone.

Exercise and eat right.

Floss after every meal.

Go bicycling.

Have a garage sale.

Indulge in an occasional manicure or massage.

Join a civic organization.

Keept your promises.

Laugh every day.

Maintain a healthy weight.

Negotiate when you disagree with someone.

Open a savings account.

Plant trees.

Quit smoking.

Recycle.

Start a monthly reading club.

Toss out things you don’t need. (Better yet, donate them to charity.)

Understand and appreciate diversity.

Volunteer time with a nonprofit organization.

Write letters to your family and friends.

Xerox your letters and send them to more family and friends!

Yield the right of way in traffic.

Zzzzzzzzz—Get plenty of sleep.

“Living Healthy, Working Well” is a monthly newsletter distributed by Merit Behavioral Care of California, a subsidiary of Magellan Behavioral Health, to State of California EAP Coordinators.